

□ WARRIOR (April 7) – Congressman Spencer Bachus (AL-6) today recognized Carnegie Hero Award Recipient Derek Creel of Warrior during a program at Warrior City Hall.

Creel was honored for his courageous response to try to save a father and son from drowning in the Black Warrior River on March 27, 2009. Putting his own life at risk, Creel, who was 19 at the time, was able to rescue the young boy and comfort him during the traumatic incident.

“The word ‘hero’ is too often overused in our society, but it applies perfectly to Derek Creel. He demonstrated both physical and spiritual strength in saving the life of a frightened child,” Bachus said.

Congressman Bachus presented Derek with a tribute to his act of courage and compassion that appeared in the Congressional Record. The text of the tribute follows.

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

HON. SPENCER BACHUS

OF ALABAMA

THURSDAY, MARCH 25, 2010

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It is an honor to bring to the attention of my colleagues the heroism of a constituent, Derek J. Creel of Warrior, Alabama. Guided by his faith, Derek put his own life at risk to save the life of a young child during a tragic outing on raging waters.

In recognition of his courageous and selfless action, Derek has been awarded the Carnegie Medal by the Carnegie Hero Fund Commission.

The criteria for this prestigious award was established by the philanthropist Andrew Carnegie in 1904, when he wrote on the Commission's founding Deed of Trust that, "We live in a heroic age. Not seldom are we thrilled by deeds of heroism where men or women are injured or lose their lives in attempting to preserve or rescue their fellows."

Derek Creel displayed extraordinary heroism in swimming to a father and son who had been overtaken by a strong current in the Black Warrior River on March 27, 2009. Excruciatingly, he could not save the father from the cold and swift waters. But he both saved and comforted the frightened young boy while rescue help arrived. Derek's spiritual strength was every bit as important to their survival during that challenging time as his physical strength.

Warrior Police Chief Raymond Horn, who was at the scene, wrote a gripping account of Derek's heroism in nominating him for the Carnegie Medal. It is a description of an exceptional action by a prayerful man that I commend to your reading.

On 03/27/09 the Warrior River, Locust Branch, was well above normal depth from recent rain storms. The currents were very strong and swift with a lot of debris, ie; stumps, trees and rocks in this river. There were more storms moving into the area later that night with flash flood warnings being posted.

The rescuer, Derek Creel, was at the river fishing. He witnessed a canoe, with an adult male

and a male child, capsized. The two victims were caught in the swift currents and very rapidly being pulled down stream while holding onto the canoe. At this point Derek Creel with total disregard for his own life or safety jumped into the cold water and swam towards the victims. After reaching the victims and the canoe he attempted to get them to the shore, but the currents were too strong and they were washed down river about half a mile from the boat launch. At this point Derek was able to steer the canoe into a downed tree in the river. He then had to physically hold onto both victims. He soon became exhausted and had to make a very difficult decision. Let one victim go and save the child and himself. The father, Tim Sagafoose was injured and was unable to help or respond. Derek was unable to hold onto the father any longer and turned him loose into the current. Derek then had to calm the young boy and explain what he had to just do. He had the presence of mind to witness to the young boy about God and salvation, all while holding onto him in the cold swift water for over for over thirty minutes before they were rescued by Warrior Firefighters Lee Kilgore and Luke Ahl.

I personally spoke with Derek at the scene and he was visibly shaken, and extremely apologetic about not being able to save the father. And he was very humble about his rescue efforts on this night.

After days of refusing media interviews, he finally did an interview on the day Tim Sagafoose's body was recovered. During this interview, Derek credited his actions to God and his Savior Jesus Christ for putting him there that day and giving him the strength to hold on.

After 34 years of Law Enforcement experience I walked away from this incident with not only amazement at the actions of Derek Creel, but true respect for him. He is a remarkable young man with strength and conviction and truly humble demeanor. I am very proud of Derek for not only his heroism, but his witness of the Lord in this difficult moment. He is truly a hero in my opinion in more ways than one.

In closing, I congratulate Derek and the entire Creel family, and I yield back the balance of my time.

